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Draft Cleanup Strategy Released for Public Comment

A Significant Step Forward in Systematically Implementing Cleanup of Nuclear Waste Sites

The Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management today released a draft strategy to accelerate the cleanup and closure of 353 projects at 53 geographic sites in the United States. In *Accelerating Cleanup: Paths to Closure*, the Environmental Management office offers project-by-project cost, schedule and scope-of-work projections for its nationwide environmental cleanup. *Paths to Closure* is a revision of a previous discussion draft, *Accelerating Cleanup: Focus on 2006*, released in June 1997; the revision reflects 600 comments from more than 170 letters received during the 90-day comment period. Today's document will be a critical tool for better management of technical activities, budgets, worker health and safety, and risk reduction at the 353 cleanup projects. *Paths to Closure's* life-cycle cost estimate for DOE-wide cleanup is approximately \$147 billion between 1997 and 2070.

"*Paths to Closure* is a significant step forward in tackling the enormous challenge of cleaning up more than 50 years of contamination from the nation's production of nuclear weapons. Ultimately, our goal is to accelerate cleanup and reduce future costs, while ensuring worker safety and public health and improving environmental protection. The draft gets us closer to meeting this goal and includes important changes that we have made based on input from stakeholders, Tribal Nations, Congress and regulators," said Acting Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management James Owendoff.

Key changes in the draft include removing life-cycle cost savings and target dates for site closure, except for Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site in Colorado and the Fernald Environmental Management Project in Ohio. At those sites, communities, regulators and Tribal Nations have agreed on targets with the Environmental Management and site offices. Comments on the discussion draft raised concerns that closure dates at other sites were unrealistic and did not reflect local consensus. In addition, enhanced performance savings targets are included only where sites, regulators, stakeholders and Tribal Nations have agreed on plans to achieve them. Sites will continue to aggressively pursue efficiencies and cost savings.

Last year, Secretary of Energy Peña designated the Miamisburg Environmental Management Project and the Weldon Spring Site in Ohio as pilot projects for accelerated cleanup by 2006. DOE is working aggressively to accelerate the closure date of the Fernald site to 2005 and the Rocky Flats closure date to 2006.

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Paths to Closure contains detailed projections on the scope, schedules and costs for the cleanup of contaminated soil, groundwater and facilities; treating, storing and disposing of waste; and effectively managing nuclear materials and spent nuclear fuel. These projections identify, where possible, future decisions that must be made and define the degree of technical and scope uncertainties at each of the 353 projects.

A key component of *Paths to Closure* is the development of "baselines," which are projections of the scope, cost and schedules of individual projects. For planning purposes, the draft report assumes a funding level of \$5.75 billion per year to demonstrate what can be accomplished with steady funding over time.

With this funding and with the accelerated goal of cleaning up the Rocky Flats site and the Fernald project (by 2006 and 2005, respectively), the number of sites completed by 2006 would amount to 43 of the current 53 sites. Other major cleanup actions expected by 2006 include:

- Remediation of 80 percent of all release sites, that is, specific locations or areas where contaminants may have been released to the environment.
- Stabilization of all nuclear materials and spent nuclear fuel and completion of all preparations for their ultimate disposition.
- Completion of all cleanup activities at several major sites, including the Miamisburg project and the Weldon Spring site.

Long-term cleanup activities will continue at the remaining 10 sites. Projections indicate that the Hanford Site in Washington, the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, and the Savannah River Site in South Carolina will incur over half the national life-cycle costs for treatment and disposal of high-level and transuranic waste, after the year 2006.

Paths to Closure also identifies a potential shortfall between projected cleanup costs and potential available funding. The Department of Energy is committed to meeting its regulatory obligations, in part with the application of productivity improvements. "The department is working hard to develop a strategy that could be used to support sufficient funding in the future," said Owendoff. "While we must work within the context of President Clinton's historic balanced budget agreement with the Congress, the program is at a critical juncture. We must continue to meet all of our obligations and accelerate cleanup where feasible, in order to reduce the ultimate cost of this work."

The 60-day public comment period for the draft national strategy and site-specific strategies ends on May 1, 1998. Written comments should be submitted to: U.S. Department of Energy, Mr. Gene Schmitt, P.O. Box 44818, Washington, D.C. 20026-4481 or to DOE site points of contact. For site contacts and copies of national or site-specific draft strategies, call the Center for Environmental Management Information (CEMI) at 1-800-736-3282 or send an e-mail to dennis.hosaflook@em.doe.gov. The *Paths to Closure* draft strategy may be accessed on the World Wide Web at <http://www.em.doe.gov>.

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